2-2010

Arts-in-Corrections: A Path to Redemption

Larry Brewster
University of San Francisco, Brewster@usfca.edu

Artists in Prison: Coloring Bleak Todays, Reforming Hopes for Tomorrow—Revisited

Larry Brewster, Ph.D.
School of Business and Professional Studies
University of San Francisco
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1047
415-422-2063
415-422-6917
Brewster@usfca.edu
2009

Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Conference
San Diego, CA
February 23-27, 2010

Arts-in-Corrections: A Path to Redemption

Abstract

The California Arts-in-Corrections (AIC) program is among the oldest in the nation. The Prison Arts Program (PAP), a three-year pilot program, was the precursor of Arts-in-Corrections. In 1983, I found the program to be cost-effective, and in 1986 wrote about the importance of prison art programs in the *Journal of American Culture*. Twenty-five years later, this paper evaluates the impact Arts-in-Corrections had on the lives of men and women during and following their incarceration. A diverse group of ex-cons as measured by race, age, gender and crimes committed were interviewed, and four of them were students in AIC at the time of the 1983 cost-benefit study. Arts-in-Corrections contributed to their self-esteem, disciplined work ethic, and made 'doing time' meaningful and safer. Several are earning a living through their art, and all self-identified as artists. AIC helped to bridge the racial divide, reconnected inmates with their families, and provided a safe haven within a hostile and threatening prison environment.

Arts-in-Corrections: A Path to Redemption

Housed in North Block at San Quentin in his early years of incarceration, Jake sought diversion "doing anything other than staring out the cell window hoping to catch a glimpse of passing seagulls." He started working on soap and wood carvings and very soon realized he had a talent for sculpting everything from tiny angels to miniature guitars and, eventually, people. The real challenge was capturing the face and giving life to the figure. He worked hours at a time, determined to master his craft. Frustrated with the limitations of soap carvings, he experimented with turning soap into paste to mimic clay and made even more intricate and life-like sculptures.

One day he was putting the finishing touches to a base guitar when a guard looked into his cell and complimented him on his work. He encouraged Jake to become involved in the Arts-in-Corrections program which was relatively new at that time. The year was 1982 and Jake was looking at fifteen years to Life for multiple armed robberies. He was nineteen years old and had never been incarcerated. Scared, he wanted to find a way to survive prison physically and psychologically. He had artistic talent, but until his involvement in Arts-in-Corrections he had no instruction in the fine arts. He served sixteen years at four institutions: Pelican Bay, San Quentin, Deuel Vocational Institution at Tracy, and the Sierra Conservation Center at Jamestown where his wood carving skills were put to use making signs. When I interviewed Jake in 2008 he had been out of prison eleven years and was making his living as a sculptor.

Although he was motivated to seek instruction and pay for art supplies on his own, it was not until Jake entered the Arts-in-Corrections program that his artistic talents flourished and his work gained recognition outside of prison. Jake was active in Arts-in-Corrections in 1983 when I

conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the program. In 1986, I wrote in the Journal of American Culture,

> Although we cannot know at this point [1986] how effective programs like Arts-in-Corrections will be in helping inmates once released from prison, we do know that over 90 percent of all prisoners now serving time will one day be released. It is therefore imperative that we offer some hope for a better future to inmates through alternative programs in the institutions (Brewster 35).

While the 1983 study found the program to be cost-effective, Arts-in-Corrections was still too new to determine the impact of the program on inmates after their release. In 1987 a recidivism study found a significantly reduced rate of recidivism for AIC participants, compared with the general population of parolees. Even more encouraging, AIC participants faired significantly better the longer they were out of prison (*California Department of Corrections Arts-in-Corrections Research Synopsis on Parole Outcomes for Participants Paroled* 5).

This qualitative study offers another view of the program through the eyes of ex-cons, current inmate-artists, artist-instructors and facilitators. A few of the ex-cons interviewed were students in the program at the time of the earlier cost-benefit study.

Program Description

The Arts-in-Corrections program was established by the California legislature in July of 1980. The program was based on the successful pilot Prison Arts Project started in 1977 at California Medical Facility at Vacaville. Individual and group instruction was offered in the arts and fine craft disciplines.

The program objectives were:

- To provide instruction and guidance to inmates in the visual, literary, performing and media and fine craft disciplines;
- To provide through professional success models in the arts an opportunity for inmates to learn, experience, and be rewarded for individual responsibility, self-discipline and hard work;
- To provide a constructive leisure time activity as a means of releasing energy not dissipated in work, relieve tensions created by confinement, spur the passage of time, and promote the physical and mental health of inmates;
- To reduce institutional tension among inmates and between inmates and staff;
- To provide public service to local communities through art projects and concerts;
- To increase participant's constructive self-sufficiency and heighten self-esteem. (Brewster 8)

State budget cuts in 1983 resulted in loss of funding for the program. Thousands of inmates benefited from the program during its twenty-three year run. The only two state facilities to offer a version of Arts-in-Corrections are San Quentin and New Folsom (California State Prison, Sacramento). They are supported through private donations, foundation grants, and artist volunteers. Vestiges of AIC can be found at most other facilities where some artist-facilitators attempt to carry forward the original model, albeit on a modest scale.

The Interviewees

Sixteen ex-cons were interviewed; fourteen were male and two female. The interviews averaged two hours. The youngest person was in his mid-thirties and the oldest in his early sixties. The majority were in their late forties and early fifties. The crimes committed included possession and sale of drugs; second-degree murder; vehicular manslaughter (drinking and

driving); fraud; robbery; prison escape; and sex offenses. Time served in one or more of the State prison facilities ranged from five to twenty-three years, and they have been out of prison from three to seventeen years.

Most were incarcerated in their late teens or early twenties and raised in dysfunctional families in poor or working-class neighborhoods. The racial and ethnic groups represented were Hispanics, African-Americans, Caucasians, and Japanese. A few did not have a high school diploma at the time of their incarceration, and only three had a college education. In addition to AIC, most pursued other educational opportunities, including completing two-year and four-year College degree programs. A few were certified in specialized trades, e.g., aircraft mechanics and welding. Only four of the respondents were free of alcohol or drug addiction at the time of their arrest and conviction.

The interviewees self-identified as musicians, writers, sculptors, painters, poets, magicians, ceramicists, print makers, and guitar and violin makers. Only three had formal training in the arts before their incarceration and involvement in AIC, and they were musicians. Two were avid readers during their child and teen-years, and one had earned an undergraduate degree in English from U.C. Berkeley. She was unable to practice her writing for psychological and emotional reasons until she entered prison and the Arts-in-Corrections program. The ex-cons were promised anonymity and therefore their names have been changed.

I observed several classes and interviewed artist-instructors and their students at San Quentin. A retired artist-facilitator who administered the program at Soledad state prison for more than twenty years was also interviewed.

The Meaning of Art in Their Lives

The early twentieth-century American painter and teacher, Robert Henri, believed that each of us possesses what he called the art spirit. He taught that any one of us can "become an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressing creature" if only our art spirit is nurtured and allowed to be freely expressed (Henri 11). The men and women interviewed spoke each in their own way about discovering their talents and passion for art and the importance of the artistic process as the "final salvation of our minds from prison insanity. Our art, in whatever form, tells us, our families, fellow inmates, and society that we, too, are still valuable" (Anonymous. Personal interview. 06 Oct. 2008)

I heard over and again from former and current inmates that the Arts-in-Corrections program taught them how to work at their art with a sense of purpose and focused discipline. The ultimate prize for most of these men and women was earned self-respect, human dignity and self-esteem. Only a very few felt that they possessed these building blocks of human character before their incarceration and participation in the program. Most importantly, the sixteen men and two women interviewed had successfully completed parole and were living productive and reasonably happy lives. Although AIC was never intended as a job creation program, nevertheless five of the sixteen interviewed are earning a part or all of their living through their art. Their professions include magician, guitar, cello and violin makers, musicians, and sculptor.

Another four earn their living in a profession related to their art. For example, one is a published author who, until recently, earned her living as a professional editor. Another is a successful chef and businessman whose culinary skills are an expression of his artistic talents. "My creativity and discipline are expressed through food that I prepare for others' enjoyment" (John. Personal interview. 14 Aug. 2008). There are musicians and song writers, one of whom is

in a Christian band in his Church, and who plays local gigs. One ex-con wrote to Claire Braz-Valentine, a long-time writing instructor in Arts-in-Corrections, thanking her and reporting on his success since leaving prison.

> I took a course in writing at Soledad where you were an instructor. I would like to thank you! I have used the things you showed me to go on to a great career in the motorcycle industry. Much of the work I do involves writing ads and scripts for the sales department. I also have been doing some minor writing and have had three of my stories published. I now own my own home and will be starting a motorcycle shop next year. I took your classes in the mid-1990s and wouldn't expect you to remember me but I thought you might like to here of 'one that got away! (From the system that is…). I truly believe you were partially responsible for my success. (Claire Braz-Valentine shared this letter on the condition the author would remain anonymous)

Each of the men and women interviewed, even those who are not pursuing their art, attribute much of their success to the AIC program, as well as to other educational and training programs they pursued while in prison. They offer themselves as evidence that rehabilitation is possible if they are given opportunities to realize their humanity. Several spoke eloquently about how ironically prison provided them with the opportunity for the first time to take stock of their lives; to ask why they had been so self-destructive and question what they could do to change their lives for the better.

John spoke for many of them when he talked about how he felt when he first arrived at Soledad. He was twenty-eight and had never been in prison. He was sentenced to nine years for rape.

> "My first impression when I arrived at Soledad was that I'd probably never leave there alive. I didn't really know what I should do to survive. Prison is very segregated along racial and ethnic lines. So my first response was, okay, well, I'll hang out with the white guys and see where that leads me. But it just wasn't going to be my thing and I knew it" (John. Personal interview. 14 Aug. 2008).

He explained that he wanted to avoid the path taken by so many gangbangers in prison:

> It was probably about three months into my time at Soledad that I really started to think about maybe getting out and trying to navigate a path through the system that would keep me from becoming an institutionalized type of individual...I just didn't want to lose anymore of my humanity. And once I started thinking about my life and how I ended up in prison...the first step was really standing in front of the mirror for an hour and staring myself down and searching for some real hard truths. I asked myself what I was about, calling myself a liar, and really just having a conversation with myself and being very, very honest. And then I decided I was going to try to improve myself. (John. Personal interview. 14 Aug. 2008)

John then talked about the many opportunities available at the time he was incarcerated:

> Fortunately when I was at Soledad there were a lot of ways to remake your life. There was an eighteen month, cutting-edge computer program sponsored by Silicon Valley companies that resulted in 100 percent job placement for ex-cons. There were different industries such as textiles and furniture that provided job skills. There were AA and bachelor programs offered through the local community college and San Jose State University. And there was the Arts-in-Corrections program. I took advantage of every program I could get into. My greatest transformation came through Arts-in-Corrections

however. I discovered my talent and passion for writing and making things out of leather. (John. Personal interview. 14 Aug. 2008)

Jake is another example of an inmate determined to turn his life around in prison. He was first incarcerated at age nineteen for armed robbery. Later, he escaped and his sentence was extended. Jake characterizes himself as "a serious felon, but not a violent one." Jake, like so many I interviewed, spoke about the meaning of art in his life.

> When you are doing your art, you don't care if you are locked down for months if you have materials and your imagination. When you work at your art, you are meditating. You are focused, able to shut out the noise and fear of prison life. You turn off the monkey mind and you no longer think about the streets or fear or girls. You get focused and quiet all the chatter, because you have found another way to be free. That's what the Arts-in-Corrections and my art gave to me, another way to be free; to reach your calm state of mind. (Jake. Personal interview. 27 Sept. 2008)

Steven was an alcoholic and a successful musician when he hit and killed an older woman as he drove drunk. He was thirty-four when sentenced for vehicular manslaughter and served five-and-a-half years at Soledad prison. He learned about Arts-in-Corrections soon after arriving at Soledad. Word spread quickly that he was a musician and one of the bands was looking for a guitar player. Steven recalled "I just wanted to get involved in the program [AIC] because that's what I do [music]" (Steven. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008). Within a relatively short time, especially as measured in prison time (things always move slowly), Steven enrolled in writing and poetry courses, joined a band, and became Jack Bowers' clerk-a retired artist-facilitator at Soledad State prison.

Steven, who had never been in jail or prison before the fatal accident, talked about what it meant to be a part of Arts-in-Corrections,

> I loved it. To me it meant escape from the cold, impersonal, and violent world that is prison. . . .you don't know what prison is about unless you go there. You can't find out from TV, you can't read about it in books. It isn't just the place that destroys you; it's knowing that you're down on the lowest rung of society. . .a number to be forgotten by those on the outside. (Steven. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008)

Steven talked about the creative forces that are in all of us and that need to find a constructive outlet.

> I believe people have a creative energy or gift that, if allowed to be expressed, can be a healthy thing. When that energy is not given an outlet it will manifest itself in other behaviors, which in many cases leads to crime. If you start mixing booze and drugs with it, the end result is never good. Arts-in-Corrections provided a positive outlet for the creativity I witnessed in so many inmates. I would think to myself, what if these people had an outlet for their talent when they were younger. Arts-in-Corrections provided the equipment, materials and instruction that so many of these guys never could afford on their own. The Program touched so many lives then and now. (Steven. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008)

Jasmine is of Japanese descent. As a very young girl, she and her family were sent to an internment camp during World War II. She and her husband (now deceased) were well educated; both were teachers. Jasmine also was a medical illustrator. She was an older woman in poor health at the time of her incarceration for fraud. She feels that she brought great shame on her family and initially she did not want to survive prison. She attributes her renewed will to live to

the Arts-in-Corrections program, and to Roberto Chavez, the artist-facilitator. He recognized her artistic talent and encouraged her to take classes. She studied drawing and painting. Jasmine talks of Mr. Chavez with reverence and said that he was "instrumental in helping me and other artist-inmates find their creative inner core while we served time" (Jasmine. Personal interview. 1 Nov. 2008). Jasmine believes that "art is part of my spiritual life. It helped me to be focused, quiet, and centered...art in prison helped to shut out the dehumanizing aspects of prison life; to focus on the joy of creating and experiencing my inner spirit, core" (Jasmine. Personal interview. 1 Nov. 2008).

Megan was first sentenced in 1987 for possession of heroin, and embezzlement. Her life spiraled out of control after the death of her seventeen year old daughter who died of Hodgkin's disease. Megan holds a Bachelor's degree in English from UC Berkeley and her father was Chair of English at a local university. Until her daughter's death, Megan held well-paid and highly responsible positions in business. Her dream, however, was to write. Unfortunately, her father's critical and disapproving nature intimidated her, preventing her from putting pen to paper. Ironically, it wasn't until her incarceration and involvement in the Arts-in-Corrections program that she found her voice as a writer.

Megan beautifully expresses her longing for the approval and love of her father in an untitled poem she wrote and published as a student in the AIC program.

When I was pre-preschool, I told my father that I loved him.

He replied, "Likewise, I'm sure."

I told my father that if I was rich, I would give him all my money.

He replied, "It is—if I ***were*** rich, Megan."

Late one night, I crept into my parents' bedroom and whispered,

"Daddy, I snuck in here to kiss you good night."

He replied, "There is no such word as ***snuck,***

Remember, Megan, ***sneak*** and ***sneaked***."

I don't tell my father I love him anymore, and likewise I'm sure.

If I were rich, I would undoubtedly give the connection all my money.

And about ***snuck***...I still ***sneak*** it in every once in awhile. (Silva 45)

As with the other interviewees, Megan attributes her salvation to Arts-in-Corrections, and especially to Ernest Dillihay, the artist-facilitator for her program.

> It was Ernest and the program itself that helped me to grow up; to see that there were better things to do with my life than be a heroin addict, and I haven't been one since my release. I have a lot of years clean and sober. That was the only drug I used and it ruined my life. It gave me three prison terms and seven violations in a very short period of time. ...When I look back on those times, the William James Association and Arts-in-Corrections changed me; changed my focus. They changed what I thought about myself; they changed what I thought I knew I could do. And I did it—I became the writer my father never validated. (Megan. Personal interview. 28 Mar. 2009)

David resorted to using drugs and alcohol to escape his depression and feelings of worthlessness. In his mid-twenties, alone and homeless, he found his way into State prison for possession after numerous arrests and convictions. Boredom first led him to Arts-in-Corrections, not a desire to paint. In time, he found himself "really getting into it," and he felt absorbed in something for the first time in his life (David. Personal interview. 9 Feb. 2009). David spoke about how, with the help of the artist-facilitator, instructors and other inmate-artists, "I felt changed from the inside because I had found something of value inside myself. For the first time

in my life, I felt like I was capable of doing something worthwhile; that I had some talent and was developing skills. I liked having people acknowledge and praise my paintings" (David. Personal interview. 9 Feb. 2009).

As with so many of the men and women interviewed, the longer I spoke with David the more I appreciated his intelligence, articulation and personal insight. There is little doubt that the AIC program has helped these men and women discover the joy of creating and the satisfaction that comes with purpose and accomplishment. James Rowland, former Director of the California Department of Corrections, expressed his support of the program when he said,

> The Arts-in-Corrections program has been shown to have a positive effect upon this problem [the revolving door between prisons and the streets]. I believe this has occurred because the inmates involved have acquired new attitudes about themselves and their capabilities through their work in the arts. The mastery of art skills requires patience, self-discipline and long term commitment. These attributes are basic to an inmate's ability to function responsibly upon release. (Email correspondence with Jack Bowers. 30 Jun. 2009)

Discovering Self

A common refrain of the men and women interviewed was that the art program had lit in them a spark of self-worth and an identity as an artist and not simply a prison number. They talked about the fact that through their art and the creative process they connected with parts of themselves they didn't know existed. In practicing their art—behind the walls and on the outside—many expressed how they had come to know their own beautiful spirits. They realized a greater and deeper sense of who they were and what they could become. As their self-

confidence grew, so did their self-worth. As they grew stronger in their own inner-spirit, they sought to mentor others.

This is not to say that they all lacked self-esteem, or were not artists. James was college educated, with a major in music theory. The same can be said for Steven, Greg and Brad. Three of these men were addicted to alcohol and/or drugs which contributed to their eventual incarceration. They were successful musicians and song writers. Steven was in the process of signing with a major record company when he hit and killed a woman while drinking and driving.

James is a convicted sex offender. He was thirty-six at the time of his imprisonment. He helped to start the guitar building program with Kenny Hill, an artist-instructor, at the Correctional Training Facility (Soledad prison) and credits Arts-in-Corrections with giving him the confidence to make guitars. He spoke about his changed self-image. "The program helped me to think of myself as a musician and artisan... it also helped me to begin feeling normal again. The system just beats you down; the humiliation of being a convict is indescribable. AIC was like a breath of normalcy and it helped me to regain my self-respect" (James. Personal interview. 20 Oct. 2008). As a direct result of the AIC program, James has built a successful shop where he builds and repairs violins, cellos and guitars. He contributes his time and expertise to the community schools where he repairs and donates musical instruments. He is nationally known and respected in the profession.

Michael was convicted of selling narcotics. While at Soledad prison he started the Soledad clowns, organizing classes to teach magic to other inmates. While in prison he became involved in the "We Care Program" where he would tell his story to children and teenagers in an effort to "scare them straight." Since his release from Soledad nearly seventeen years ago, he has

made a good living as a professional magician and life coach—and he has remained clean and sober. The Arts-in-Corrections program, along with other educational programs he pursued, helped him to have hope and self-esteem for the first time in his life. "You know, I didn't even realize the impact of the program until years later" (Michael. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008). He now is devoted to helping "wounded children" find their own hope and self-esteem through his magic shows and related work.

Michael reflected on how his own self-awareness and esteem were enhanced through AIC and the college education he received at Soledad. He realized that he was "his own worst enemy in laying blame for his poor decisions on his dysfunctional family and self-loathing" (Michael. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008). The educational programs, and the time he spent inside Soledad gave him the opportunity to learn "who I am and what I'm capable of becoming. I no longer defined myself as an angry man who had to turn to drugs and crime to make it in this world. I'm smart, talented and I'm now college educated. I can make a difference in the world through my magic shows and life coaching skills"(Michael. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008). Michael emphasized that his transformation was underway before he became involved in the Arts-in-Corrections program. "I was already working on healing my life by changing my attitude and behaviors when I first enrolled in AIC's poetry and writing classes. However, there is no question that the writing instructors and artist-facilitator, Jack Bowers, were instrumental in helping me to stay focused and to develop disciplined work habits for the first time in my life" (Michael. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008).

You will recall that Jake discovered he wanted to be a sculptor while in prison, having no idea what he wanted to do with his life before incarceration at nineteen. He was a young, African-American male raised in a poor neighborhood, with no real sense of identity other than

as a troubled teen. As he said, "at nineteen you're so young you haven't really experienced life and then you find yourself in prison with no hope for a future. Your self-worth falls to the bottom of the bucket. It's easy to get pulled into gangs, to be a gangbanger" (Jake. Personal interview. 27 Sept. 2008).

He spoke about the meaning of art in his life and how it changed his self-image. "Often times after sculpting a piece of art, I looked at my hands in amazement and I would ask myself, 'I did this? Me?' And it made me want to keep doing my sculpting. I knew I had found what I wanted to be in life. I wanted to be a sculptor" (Jake. Personal interview. 27 Sept. 2008). And he is today.

His identity as a sculptor was reinforced through feedback from his artist-instructors, some of the correction officers, and, perhaps most important, other inmates.

> My hardest critics were my best customers; inmates will not give you a break. I would hear 'hey Jake, that don't look like him! That nose is too big! That eye is bigger than the other eye. Your ears don't look right. No, no, start that one over. And it got to where officers were asking for sculptures of their children or wife or parents...it made me feel so proud. And they'd come back, 'hey, Jake, I can't give you this but I wanted to show you where I put your sculpture because that's how much it meant to me and my family.' So it made me realize that my art was something special, and that I should do this, and that's what I do. (Jake. Personal interview. 27 Sept. 2008)

Roberto was twenty-three when he was sentenced for second degree murder. He had never been incarcerated before his fatal decision that took a life. He is Hispanic and was raised in East Los Angeles. At the time of his arrest he occasionally worked at an auto body shop doing customized painting. The Arts-in-Corrections program was his first exposure to fine art. He

enrolled in drawing, painting and creative writing courses soon after arriving at Pelican Bay prison. Later, he was transferred to Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI), a lower security facility at Tracy, where he was introduced to woodworking class in the AIC program. With the help of Steve Emrick, the artist-facilitator, Roberto eventually hooked up with Kenny Hill, a guitar maker and artist-instructor.

Roberto had no experience in woodworking, let alone building guitars, before joining the program at DVI in Tracy. As he said, "I didn't know the classical guitar from a folk guitar—I had no idea about music or musical instruments. So I started to learn from Kenny and another inmate, James, who was building a classical guitar. I learned as much as I could from him [James] and Kenny. That's when I made my first instrument" (Roberto. Personal interview. 13 Oct. 2008). Roberto describes how he read every book he could find on the "history of classical guitar and the builders and musicians like Andre Segovia and Julian Bream. It was just such a rich history and tradition that...it felt like it just fit...like I found my niche, my identity" (Roberto. Personal interview. 13 Oct. 2008). The AIC guitar-making program started a ten-year study and practice for Roberto while on the inside. He learned to play guitar for his enjoyment and to test the quality of his instruments. His guitar business is expanding and his clients include Harry Belafonte who gave one of Roberto's guitars to Carlos Santana for his birthday.

The writing program had a tremendous impact on John's self-image. "It was the first time that I truly looked at myself as a writer, as someone who could write well and tell a good story. I was receiving a lot of positive feedback from Zoe, my writing instructor, and the other inmates in the class" (John. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008). He went on to say,

> First and foremost while in class we saw ourselves as writers and artists, even if we were just beginning the process. And, of course, Zoe did a lot to make us feel like writing was

> the most important thing we could do. And we all believed that it was the most important thing at the time. ...so it was deeply impactful for me because it caused me to write complete stories and I started to see myself as a storyteller. (John. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008)

Larry is Caucasian and was raised in a tough, working class and racially divided neighborhood in East Los Angeles. He was convicted of second degree murder and spent seventeen years in prison. Larry is an example of a convict who was determined to avail himself of every opportunity to learn and acquire skills while in prison. He enrolled in college and vocational courses; completing several certification programs, including welding, business administration and aircraft mechanics. He also enrolled in Arts-in-Corrections.

It was during his involvement in AIC that he started "looking over the shoulder of another artist who was building guitars and I soon realized this guy was taking guitar building to a different level. I mean world class. I started working with him; learning from him; and the next thing I knew, I was hooked" (Larry. Personal interview. 12 Oct. 2008). The inmate that influenced Larry was Roberto. That experience forever changed Larry's self-image. "When people ask me what I do, I tell them I work heavy industry construction, but I'm an artist" (Larry. Personal interview. 12 Oct. 2008). He attributes his success as a guitar builder to the Program, Kenny Hill, and especially to Roberto—a fellow con.

Three-quarters of those interviewed self-identified as artists, whether they made their living through their art or not. Larry is a perfect example. He makes a very good living as a welder working high-rise construction. His work takes him all over the country and overseas. Larry explains "I work heavy construction. When whatever project I'm working on is over and I

get laid-off until the next one, I go back to my studio and build guitars—that is my first love, the other is for income" (Larry. Personal interview. 12 Oct. 2008).

Doing Time

Each of us struggles to live fulfilling lives no matter our circumstances. We search for meaning and strive each day to accomplish something, anything. In one sense, "we're all doing time," in the words of Bo Lozoff. He writes in his book of the same title that it's not the external trappings of our lives that set us free; rather the enduring qualities of courage, passion, kindness, discipline, self-esteem, honor, and respect. How we choose to use our time, whether we live in luxury or are locked away in prison, determines who we are and what we will become.

The inmate-artists interviewed reported without exception that Arts-in-Corrections changed what it meant "to do time" as they worked at their art. Earlier I quoted Jake when he described how art was meditation for him and it served to turn off the "monkey mind." Later in our conversation, he told me that he often would awake early in the morning with an idea or vision of what he wanted to create that day and then would proceed to work on the piece until it was done.

In his words:

> I could start early in the morning, seven o'clock, working on a sculpture and stop at seven that night, twelve hours later, and I would still be sitting in my boxer shorts at the table with a mess of soap or some other material, and I look at the time and I say to myself, 'Man, I feel like I just woke up'...because you have no concept of time. My body would be totally relaxed and I would feel good about what I had made that day" (Jake. Personal interview. 27 Sept. 2008).

Others told similar stories as they worked on their music, wrote their stories and poems, and painted. They mentioned that artists need time to perfect their work, and time was the one thing they had in abundance. Ray told me that other inmates would tease him, saying, "Ray, you're not going to have time to do your writing on the outside like you do in here, you'll have to get a real job" (Ray. Personal interview. 6 Oct. 2008). They were right he told me. Even so, he sees himself as a writer and the writing program helped preserve his sanity while doing his time. "The perception of time," observed Russ, "is a very important thing. You know, prison time can be a monster, it is oppressive. That changed for me while I was in my art classes, or working at my art in my cell. Time never went as fast as it did during those times when I was focused not on me, or my surroundings, but on my art" (Russ. Personal interview. 16 Jul. 2008).

Holmes, who is serving a life sentence at San Quentin and is an active member of the writing program, wrote in response to my question: why should the State continue Arts-in-Corrections and the writing program,

> To continue this class [Zoe's writing course] would be a wise investment in a continuing journey for those of us who have little else in our lives. I have written more in this course than I have in my lifetime. It has enabled me to sharpen my writing skills and broaden my scope of awareness. As an inmate trapped in a cage, this program allows me the capacity to feel, to speak, to vent and, yes, even to cry. It is the one thing I look to each week more than anything else. This class is a wise investment...in its continued embrace I will grow, be challenged and learn. Such experiences are rare indeed. I truly believe that this class and its teacher [Zoe] have changed me for the better and nurtured an artist in me I never knew existed. (Personal letter, February 2009)

Chris spoke at length about how Arts-in-Corrections helped him do his time. "Oh yeah, I counted on going to classes and working on my art in the evenings and in my cell. It provided a space in which to escape daily prison life. When I was working on my art I didn't have to think about all the other stuff. It was just me and my art" (Chris. Personal interview. 16 Aug. 2008). So many of the men and women interviewed did not want to spend their time "sitting around lifting weights, playing dominos, hanging out on the yard—the typical activities associated with prison life." (Anonymous. Personal interview. 06 Oct. 2008). Dan put it this way. "It helped to have a creative outlet, a positive activity that kept me off the yard and other places you might be if you didn't have anything else to do with your time—places that may not be safe." All agreed that Arts-in-Corrections helped to keep guys from getting into trouble" (Dan. Personal interview. 5 Nov. 2008).

The musicians spoke longingly about playing music together with their bands, practicing long hours to perfect their techniques and, in some cases, their song writing. James recalled that the music program felt like a

> breath of normalcy...because we were in this trailer (Soledad) making fine music, Vivaldi and Bach and stuff and right outside, you could hear the clanking of the weight pile. It was right outside the door, and inside the trailer you are playing beautiful classical music...really fine music...you welcome the relief from the realities of prison life.(James. Personal interview. 20 Oct. 2008)

Jasmine believes that art is part of our spiritual life. She thinks it is "important to be quiet, focused, centered during the creative process. Time is an important element...art in prison helped to shut out the dehumanizing aspects of prison life; to focus on the joy of

creating…experiencing your inner-spirit, your core being" (Jasmine. Personal interview. 1 Nov. 2008).

> From the perspective of an artist-instructor, Zoe observed that she has some students Who only write about their prison experience and find a kind of relief, release, in trying to make sense of it. And I have other students who will never write about prison and who only want to use the writing to go to another place. I have one student, Ernie, who…he was a gold prospector at the time of his incarceration, a real mountain man. He spent all of his time in the woods and mountains and he only writes about those experiences. He only writes about the life that he loved and it's a way for him to go back there and not be in prison for a while. He talks very eloquently about how important that is for him…to be able to escape. The title of our latest anthology is, *A Means of Escape*(Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008).

A common refrain heard from so many of the former inmates interviewed was "how am I going to learn while paying for my mistakes" (Anonymous. Personal interview. 06 Oct. 2008). A surprising number of them feel strongly that prison, thanks to programs such as Arts-in-Corrections, quite possibly saved them— albeit, it was a painful path to redemption.

Creating a Safe Haven, Bridging the Racial Divide

Prisons are dangerous places, made more so by overcrowding, racial segregation and gangs. An unwritten rule of prison life is that inmates are to hang with their own group—defined by racial, geographic and gang affiliations. The general thinking is that if you want to survive prison you need to join a gang or, at least, associate with people of your own color. The racial dynamic in prisons dictates that people of the same race band together to protect each other from

predators. Simply put, race lines are stark and prison politics requires that inmates remain loyal to their race.

The exception to this rule may be found inside the classrooms of Arts-in-Corrections. Those interviewed recalled how they found themselves working alongside men of different races, many for the first time in their lives. I observed this in my classroom visits as well. The writing class, for example, had nine men engaged in a lively and thoughtful critique of a book assigned for that night's class. They did not always agree with the others' opinions and expressed their differences in no uncertain terms. They did so, however, with civility, courtesy and even humor. These men were African-American, Caucasian and Hispanic. Their love of writing bonded them despite their racial differences.

R.F. Gilliam, a student in Zoe's class, wrote:

> Once a week I sit at a table surrounded by the dregs of society; men banished to a grim Purgatory; men I didn't know three years ago. I sit with them and bare my soul through the words I've written, awaiting their judgment. These men are all convicted criminals, as am I, who have committed robberies, burglaries, and murder. I share my thoughts and creativity with them because they, like me, yearn to make something more of our existence. They dream of becoming more than the sum of their crimes, more than the labels they've become in the eyes of others. Even though these men are criminals I have discovered all of them are intelligent, thoughtful individuals with unique experiences and perspectives on the world we live in. Their voices are the ones you don't hear in polite society; their stories reveal the darkness and demons we all wrestle with, some more successfully than others. These men, who speak from experience of broken homes, abusive relationships, and of life lived on the gritty streets inhabited by gangbangers,

> drug addicts, hookers and hustlers have helped me to grow as a person, and to expand my horizons. Although they never ask it, I thank these men for their sharing, and it is with equanimity and humility they accept my praise as they struggle to become something more than they are, through writing, as I do. That's what this program means to me; a chance to redeem myself in the eyes of society, and in my own. (Personal letter, February 2009)

I found the same mutual respect and support in Kate's painting class. She knows that many of her students "watch out for one another while living with hundreds of other men in a large open gymnasium"(Kate. Personal interview. 31 Oct. 2008). Kate made the point that:

> While many taboo issues can be discussed and approached in the general population of inmates, mental illness remains a stigmatizing topic. The opportunity for inmates with psychological diagnoses to come together around art serves their artistic process, but the group also becomes a safe place for inmates to discuss their daily battle with the mental health symptoms that they usually try to hide when on the yard or sharing a small space with their bunkies. Most men in my class live in open gymnasiums filled with bunk beds. No human puts their bed in the middle of a room with all sides exposed, so a sea of bunk-beds occupied by people convicted of violence and criminal behavior would be exceptionally unsettling for anyone. If an inmate is already hearing voices, having paranoid delusions or panic attacks, the environment of prison undeniably aggravates symptoms. Prison mental health services are very limited and usually consist solely of medicating inmates. While making art and developing individual styles, thinking about how to best depict an idea or feeling, my class can also be a place to talk about medication side-effects, nightmares, and bazaar themes of paranoia. The group isn't

> designed to cure mental illness or solve the underlying trauma, but can serve as an affirmation that no one is alone. No one is going to call a member of the group a "jay-bird" and alienate him on the yard. Instead they watch out for one another and discuss the danger of isolating behavior and make themselves accessible to each other outside of the group. The art made in my classroom reflects a community that recognizes that they can feel safe including putting their whole selves into their work. (Kate. Personal interview. 31 Oct. 2008).

James, Roberto and Larry are excellent examples of three men, two Caucasians and one Hispanic, who profoundly influenced one another. Roberto first took an interest in the guitar program while watching James build a guitar. Roberto became the teacher to Larry who, to this day, considers Roberto his greatest positive role model and friend. When asked about race and prison, Roberto explained that

> it is all about survival. You're thrown into prison at a young age and you quickly learn that you can't shake this guy's hand or sit in a certain part of the yard....it's very easy to get caught up in prison politics and racial divisions. The art program took me out of that scene. It showed me something different inside prison. It allowed me to communicate with people without being so conscious of their race or affiliation. (Roberto. Personal interview. 31 Oct. 2008)

Others pointed out that the "racial stuff" went away and they "were artists first; part of a community of artists. Arts-in-Corrections was like a subculture" (Anonymous. Personal interview. 06 Oct. 2008). You may recall that Larry and Roberto grew up in East Los Angeles in very different neighborhoods where their worlds were separated along race lines. Ironically, they found one another in prison through Arts-in-Corrections.

Russ described it this way,

> ...in the AIC classroom we could sit and kick around ideas. When you're on the yard there's a certain mindset. As much as you think you can ignore it, there's a certain mindset that permeates everything and everyone in prison. You just never know what's going to happen...but when you're in the art room, everybody's mindset is locked into doing their art, and offering help to the other guys. We can forget being the tough guy. You know, forget doing the rooster thing. It is safe to kick ideas around... 'Hey, what about this lick [if you're a musician]? What colors did you mix together to get that scene in your painting? What, pastel? Oh man, are you using a thesaurus when you're writing? How're you getting this—how are you finding this stuff, man?' It's a whole different environment inside the classrooms and workshops. It's like a subculture within the subculture. It's just a state of mind that you're able to achieve. Of course, you are in prison and you never know what's going to jump off, you never know. Still, locked in a classroom with the teachers and inmate-artists...it's a beautiful thing. (Russ. Personal interview. 16 Jul. 2008).

Katya, an artist-instructor, told about an inmate in her print making course who was nearing parole and wanted a safe place to finish his time without incident. He was on medication for a mental disorder that caused his hands to shake uncontrollably. His condition made it very difficult for him to make a block print, but he worked at it with great patience and determination. The other inmates knew how important it was for him to be in the class and they were very supportive, actually protective. As Katya explained, "he was a very mild-mannered, gentle guy who just needed a place to be safe. The other guys took him in and were happy to oblige him even though he lacked real artistic skills and experience. They knew he was close to parole and

that he just wanted and needed a place to be that was off the yard" (Katya. Personal interview. 26 Dec. 2008). He was paroled, and he was able to complete his block print for his family.

Reconnecting with Family

Children pay the price for their parents' crimes. The impact of incarceration on families is devastating and is a national family crisis. Families, and especially children, must also deal with feelings of shame and social stigma. Imprisonment is not a reason for celebration, nor a reason to be proud. Many families do not tell even their closest friends about a relative's incarceration and often go to great lengths to protect the inmate's children from the consequences of revealing this family secret. There is compelling evidence that the incarceration of parent(s) often leads to a child's lowered self-esteem, depression, and anti-social behavior.

A few of the men interviewed spoke poignantly about how Arts-in-Corrections played an important role in helping them to remain connected in a meaningful way to their children. Some said their art helped other inmates to reconnect with members of their families. Ray, for example, said that one inmate said to him, "You know what Ray? You're a blessing." When Ray asked why, the inmate answered, "because of you my grandmother is speaking to me again. When I sent the portrait of my daughter that you did for me to her for Mother's Day, it softened her heart. Because of you, man, she really thought that was wonderful and she figured that my giving the picture to her showed that I really did care. You made it possible" (Ray. Personal interview. 6 Oct. 2008).

I had the opportunity to speak with Jake's and Roberto's sons. They shared that their fathers' art served to open the channels of communication and was a source of pride. Roberto described his family as "tight" and their communication remained open during his incarceration.

His two boys were very young at the time of his arrest and conviction, and they were raised by his sister while he was in prison.

> What the Arts-in-Corrections program did, I think, is it gave me and my boys something to talk about in the visiting room...a topic of conversation other than the idle or awkward chit-chat you so often hear among families during visitation. We'd draw pictures on napkins and talk about fine art and my guitars and music. Because I was enrolled in other art courses, it wasn't just the guitars that we talked about. There was always something of interest that helped us to communicate and that made my boys proud of me....they could talk with their friends about how their dad made guitars and painted pictures...they showed their friends the guitars I made for them, and eventually they learned to play as well. They tell me it helped erase the stigma of having their father in prison. (Roberto. Personal interview. 13 Oct. 2008)

Today, Roberto's boys are young adults who learned to play on their father's first hand-made guitar. Roberto's son, Tony, said to me "I fell in love with playing the guitar through my dad's program. Before then I didn't have an interest in music. It changed my life and now I'm a musician and artist like my dad. Talking with dad about his art classes and what he was learning. It made it easier for me while he was in prison. I'm really proud of what my dad accomplished" (Roberto. Personal interview. 13 Oct. 2008).

Self-Improvement

The probability for a successful "reintegration" back into society is greatly improved as inmates acquire skills and knowledge through college and specialized training programs, as well as treatment for their addictions. Unfortunately, the de-emphasis on rehabilitation in combination with the rise of American mass incarceration has contributed to the "revolving door" syndrome

that keeps our jails and prisons bursting at the seams. The number of inmates receiving drug treatment, job training, arts and other educational programs has steadily declined under the now dominant penal paradigm of literal "incapacitation."

Most of the interviewees were fortunate to be incarcerated at a time when California prisons offered a plethora of training and educational programs, and they took advantage of the opportunities for self-improvement. Larry is an excellent example of someone who wanted to improve himself while serving time.

> I was determined to make the best use of my time while paying my debt to society. I was fortunate that Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI) offered a number of vocational and educational programs. I went through a welder apprentice program that last six years, for example. I'm now a journeyman welder and make my living at it. I'm certified in a number of vocational fields...and they were as good as any trade or technical school on the outside. I also knew Arts-in-Corrections was teaching me important skills and a work ethic that would serve me...mostly, it provided me with a passion for guitar building that defines me today. (Larry. Personal interview. 12 Oct. 2008)

Larry also earned a college degree while doing his time.

It was commonplace for AIC inmates to pursue other educational and training programs. Michael is another example of an AIC inmate-artist who sought a college education while serving his time at Soledad prison. "I went back to school, which was very scary for me. I pulled it off and even got on the Dean's honor roll several times. I thought, wow, I'm smarter than I thought" (Michael. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008). A few, like Brad, discussed how in a strange way they felt freer while in prison than they did before their incarceration because they had opportunities to get an education or training, and they had time for honest self-reflection, an

opportunity which was not available to them when they were young and poor. To be sure, they were anxious to do their time and get out of prison, but they were more relaxed about it and focused on their art and other educational programs. Russ expressed it this way, "I ended up not feeling so attached to getting out...the programs gave me something to look forward to each week, and I knew I was growing and learning, and I felt hopeful...all of which were new experiences for me" (Russ. Personal interview. 16 Jul. 2008).

Michael Willis, a San Quentin inmate-artist, wrote:

> I constantly find myself becoming more appreciative of the life I have today. I am due to graduate from Patten University with my A.A. degree in June 2009. I'm writing short stories and performing in Shakespeare plays. These are all things which I could not have imagined before June 2005. Just goes to show that no matter how dim things may appear one moment, in the next, your life can become fully illuminated and filled with blessings. The most beautiful part of all is that I am just scrubbing the surface of my potential and the best is yet to come. (Personal letter, February 2009)

Rehabilitation

Nearly every one spoke about the power of art as a means for rehabilitation and restoration of human dignity through disciplined and focused personal work. Each of them recalled how the artistic process significantly affected their self-esteem and general outlook on the world. Most thought of themselves first as artists and then as ex-cons.

Kenneth Brydon, an inmate at San Quentin, and an active member of the writing program, expressed why he thinks it is important to support Arts-in-Corrections, and especially

the writing program. "Creative writing provides meaningful rehabilitation for inmates including myself. Learning to express one's self is a process of self-discovery, and very beneficial to finding productive and positive expressions in opposition to negative and destructive ones" (Personal letter. 01 Feb. 2009).

Rick, a lifer at New Folsom prison, wrote a poem about rehabilitation and the artistic process that captures the sentiment of many of the men and women interviewed. His poem is entitled, "Rehabilitation"

Rehabilitation is said to be a faded memory,
A lost thought that no longer occurs.
But I don't care what is said and I don't care what is thought,
Though it's true day after day and year after year
for years and years on end.
They tried to kill rehabilitation and creation
with condemnation and correction,
but year after year they still fail to obliterate the
passion of an artist's soul.
And I hear rehabilitation day after day and year after year.
I hear it in the scratching of pencils across paper.
I hear it in the newly formed notes of an instrument that still remains,
and I hear it boldly announced in the public's words
'To hell with rehabilitation, and yet I and many other artists
will not be denied the God-given gift to create and to dream,
to escape the confines of Corrections on the wings of our passion.

> So when there is a flute, a pen, a paint brush, a guitar or any other artistic paraphernalia in our hands, we are examples of rehabilitation—
> no longer of condemning or correcting.
> Rehabilitation is found in an artist's passion to create.
> Rehabilitation lives. It lives in me and in every other artist who
> in spite of this place still exercises the God-given gift to be an artist. ("Inmate Interviews")

Artist-Facilitators and Instructors

Inmates are not the only beneficiaries of the program. The same is true for the artist-facilitators and instructors. They have learned important lessons as people and as artists. Katya, for example, learned "to be patient. I've learned a lot in that regard. Time is just different in prison. The way guys take time to have a conversation, for example, is very different than for most of us in our daily, hectic, fast-paced lives. I'm trying to be more patient with my art and in my life generally" (Katya. Personal interview. 26 Dec. 2008).

Claire explained that in her more than twenty years teaching for Arts-in-Corrections she learned to confront her own prejudices.

> I tended to judge people too quickly and based on what I saw…first appearances. I've come to realize that the inner truth or being of a person can be very different; the old expression that you can't judge a book by its cover is true. Over the years I have come to know the real truth of many of my male and female students through their writings. They become fellow writers with their own stories to tell. At times I have revealed my surprise at their humanity as expressed in their words and thoughts. At those moments my

> students are quick to remind me that they, too, are poets, writers and artists, and yes, convicts. They are many things, as are each of us. Inmates talk about traveling in cars inside prison, meaning they hang out with like-minded people. My poetry students tell me they travel in the poet's car. They take pride in their writing and identifying with other poets. (Claire. Personal interview. 15 Jul. 2009).

The artist-instructors spoke about the joy of teaching many of the same students over several years; witnessing their growth as artists and as people—a luxury teachers rarely experience in a "normal" school environment. The instructors and facilitators commented on how most of the inmates are ideal students in that they are enthusiastic and grateful for the opportunity to learn. They are prepared for every class, often coming with questions or completed projects for which they eagerly seek answers or feedback. In the time between classes, which can be several weeks if there is a lockdown, the inmates spend their free time working on their art or homework assignments. Zoe described her San Quentin class as a "fantastic environment within which to work. I have eager, interested, respectful students, most of whom are experiencing profound life changes as they struggle with their writing. It's just a wonderful experience as a teacher" (Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008). All four instructors feel of value and valuable to their students—as a teacher there is no better feeling.

This may help to explain why they are willing to donate hundreds of hours and art materials each year in support of their students and the program. When the Department of Corrections eliminated the Arts-in-Corrections program in 2003, the limited version of AIC offered at San Quentin and New Folsom prisons became dependent on donations and grant funding, along with the generous spirit and commitment of the artists. [Rehabilitation was not added to the title of the Department until its reorganization in 2005]

Zoe, Katya, Claire and Kate are particularly admiring of their students' focused attention on their art as they live and work in extraordinarily crowded and loud spaces, all the while deprived of any privacy. Katya said, "What I really respect is that they never have privacy, or quiet. Never, ever, ever. Not even for the most intimate daily activities. And somehow they learn how to shut-out all the noise and clamor and chaos and focus on their art work. I envy them" (Katya. Personal interview. 26 Dec. 2008).

Claire observed that working with her students on the inside has helped her to be less sensitive to distractions. My students have to write surrounded by noise and chaos and somehow they have learned to tune most of it out while they focus on their writing. "They have taught me what focused, disciplined work really means. I am grateful for the lessons" (Claire. Personal interview. 15 Jul. 2009). Zoe is equally impressed by her students' abilities to tune out the chaotic environment and focus on their work.

> I don't know how they are able to write in their environment. I mean, can you imagine being in, what is it, an 8 x 5 cell with another person and trying to write when it's so noisy, incredibly noisy, and lots of interruptions and buzzers buzzing and keys clanking and toilets flushing and TVs blaring and people screaming and yelling. I just don't know how they do it...I think the ability to focus and tune it out is also one of the gifts of writing, that you can kind of tune out that chaos for at least a little while. (Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008).

Undoubtedly the founder of Arts-in-Corrections, Eloise Smith, would be proud of their ability to tune out their environment through discipline, focused attention, and passion for their art.

Zoe believes her strong suit as a writing instructor is to "create a space where people feel safe and can share their work, can share their inner feelings through their writing, and push

themselves to stretch and find their own voice" (Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008). She, like the other instructors, enjoys the "opportunity to work with students long-term. . . .In that sense, it is much more like a writing group and I benefit as a writer alongside the men" (Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008).

One reason Zoe is interested in teaching writing in prison is the potential that story telling has for helping inmates to put themselves in the shoes of others.

> I think there is a direct correlation between writing stories and compassion. The characters in your story will not be authentic or truthful if you don't write from their perspective—you must become each of your characters. You have to think about what's it like to be this other person. How would this person respond? I think that's one of the most powerful experiences my students can have. . .to be able, through their writing, to image what its like to be someone else and to experience things the way that person experiences them. I assume that someone who commits a crime isn't thinking about how their criminal act will impact the victim or their family. I believe there can be a direct correlation between writing, conscience, and compassion or empathy. (Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008)

She spoke about one inmate who wrote stories with "vengeance" as a constant theme. She would ask if he was even aware of this recurring theme, and if so, why was it so important to him. She gently prodded him to consider "other possible storylines, to nudge him out of his fixation with revenge and get him to imagine different outcomes, possibly even involving forgiveness. . .The writing course gives us permission to have conversations about alternative ways of thinking and behaving" (Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008).

Jack Bowers, an accomplished musician and composer, devoted more than twenty years as artist-facilitator working with inmates and instructors at Soledad prison. Jack made the point that while the AIC programs at each of the prison facilities offered a range of art classes, "every prison had a different artist facilitator who, in turn, brought to that facility a unique focus based on artistic interests and background. If the facilitator was a visual artist, there would be an emphasis in that medium. Everett Jensen, an outstanding muralist, evolved this incredible mural program at Mule Creek" (Jack. Personal interview. 19 Jan. 2009).

Jack recalled Dick Crispo, a well-known muralist who preceded him as artist-facilitator at Soledad, who "created along with AIC inmates the longest indoor mural in the world and was in the *Guinness Book of World Records*" (Jack. Personal interview. 19 Jan. 2009). Under Jack's direction the Soledad AIC program eventually offered one of the most robust music programs in the State prison system. At its peak, there were over 20 bands. Jack's greatest source of pride was the development of his music theory curriculum. Guitar building became his marquee program, garnering public attention and he raised funds for community-based programs through art sales and auctions, including the sale of guitars.

He fondly recalled the Arts-in-Corrections conferences in which "the most extraordinary and dedicated artists and teachers gathered to talk about how best to expand programs in response to the needs of the inmate-artists. These gatherings were exciting, inspiring and the creative energy was infectious" (Jack. Personal interview. 19 Jan. 2009). Jack went on to explain that Arts-in-Corrections was "the most significant thing that happened in my life. Working inside prison where I met some extraordinary men and worked with amazing artists was a real gift. I learned and I watched men develop as artists and human beings. I'm proud of what we accomplished" (Jack. Personal interview. 19 Jan. 2009).

Jack believes "the public would be surprised to learn how truly diverse the prison population is...every kind of person can be found inside the walls. You meet all kinds" (Jack. Personal interview. 19 Jan. 2009). I could not help but think as I listened to Jack and recalled the men and women I interviewed, 'There but for the Grace of God go I'...and you.

Concluding Remarks

Severe overcrowding, poor inmate health care, and the Great Recession may be the perfect storm that will lead to much needed prison reform and more effective correctional policies. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation must deal with a $1.2 billion cut to its FY2009 budget and respond to an order from three federal judges to reduce the prison population because of unconstitutionally poor health care for inmates. California is not alone in having to tackle the myriad of problems that naturally follow in the wake of a broken criminal justice system and record numbers of incarcerated citizens.

The correctional policies of the past three decades—get tough on crime laws leading to lengthy, mandatory incarceration and less emphasis on rehabilitation—are under scrutiny. Interest in ideas that have long been out of favor with politicians, the public and law enforcement and correctional officers are back on the public agenda for consideration. These ideas include sentencing discretion, discretionary parole release, softening enforcement of technical parole violations, and rehabilitation. So far the California state legislature and governor have fallen short of enacting reforms and time is running out for them.

Ironically, rehabilitation was added to the California Department of Corrections title (CDCR) in 2005 at a time when funding for education, vocational training and drug and alcohol treatment was reduced, and in the case of Arts-in-Corrections, eliminated altogether. In the thirty

years that we have been tough on crime we have required little or nothing of inmates; they can simply sit in their cells or hang out on the yard if they choose. Where is the rehabilitation in that?

Arts-in-Corrections has awakened the art spirit in hundreds of convicts in its nearly thirty-years, and the artistic process has helped them to work with discipline, focus and determination to perfect their art. Along the way they acquired skills and knowledge and, most importantly, developed self-confidence, esteem, and an identity other than as a convict. The men and women in this study are examples of how art can lead to redemption and a healed heart. The words and life of Jake the sculptor sums it up best:

> I am a 47-year-old African-American male. I'm living with my ex-wife, nine-year-old son, and Katie, our dog. My mother married at sixteen. After my parents divorced, three military stepfathers raised my brothers and me. The military moved us every three years to Texas, Hawaii, Louisiana, Colorado, New Jersey and California. I'm the oldest, and I had to constantly adjust to new schools, people, places and the 'rules' of how to best fit in. I learned how to make friends, but it has taken me much longer to learn how to keep them. At seventeen, I joined the Army, and received basic training in South Carolina, followed by two years of active duty at Ft. Ord, California. At nineteen, I was arrested for multiple armed robberies. My civil conviction led to a general discharge from the Army. Sixteen years of my life were spent in California State Prisons with a C-xxxx identification number to represent me. . .breaking the law to feed my addiction to cocaine caused me and my family a lot of pain. I have learned from my mistakes and I hope to help others make better choices for their tomorrows. I've been out of prison since March 11, 1997. . . .creating art has given me the strength to believe in something greater than myself and to move past my addictions and the heartaches of child abuse. Through my

> ability as a sculptor, mold maker, and wood carver I have something to give to others and to myself. I am passionate about teaching and creating and making a living doing what I love. Art was my escape when incarcerated and now that I'm free, art is the 'wind beneath me'. Hard work, focused attention, and determination to better myself helped me to develop my talent and provided me with a well rounded set of skills that can always be made better through experience, education, and the creative process. These are the tools given to me by Arts-in-Corrections and I've used them to shape various mediums, including my life. We all have strengths and weaknesses and can learn from each other if we are willing to open ourselves. I offer to render my services through the power of creativity, the sharing of truths, and a fair exchange. (Jake. Personal interview. 27 Sept. 2008)

Jake's story and so many like his serve as a reminder that we should not, cannot give up on people—perhaps especially those on the "lowest rung of the ladder." Hope may be found in treatment, training and educational programs; whereas, the "punishment" model that has been dominate for the past three decades merely serves to grow the prison industry at an unsustainable cost to taxpayers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the Jesuit Foundation of the University of San Francisco for awarding a research grant in support of this study. Dr. Yvonne Bui was instrumental in kick-starting my writing, and Noreen Barrington and Sofia Martinez were invaluable as editors.

Works Cited

"California Department of Corrections Arts-in-Corrections Research Synopsis on Parole Outcomes for Participants Paroled." William James Association. Feb.1987. Print.

Bowers, Jack. "Arts-in-Corrections Student Survey, San Quentin," William James Association, San Cruz, CA., 2007. 42. Print.

Brewster, Lawrence G., "An evaluation of the Arts-in-Corrections Program of the California Department of Corrections," Santa Cruz, CA: William James Association, 1983.Print

---. "Artists in Prison: Coloring Bleak Todays, Reforming Hopes for Tomorrow," *Journal of American Culture*, Bowling Green, 9.2, (1986): 8-35. Print.

Henri, Robert. *The Art Spirit*. New York: Basic Books, 2007. Print.

"Inmate Interviews." *Arts in Corrections*. Dir. Jim Carlson, 2008. DVD.

Lozoff, Bo. *We're All Doing Time: A Guide to Getting Free*. Durham, NC: Human Kindness Foundation, 1985. Print.

Silva, Megan. "Untitled." *About Time III: A Third Anthology of California Prison Writing*. Santa Cruz, CA: William James Association, 1987. 45-80. Print.

Interviews

Brad. Personal interview. 04 Aug. 2008

Chris. Personal interview. 16 Aug. 2008

Claire. Personal interview. 15 Jul. 2009

Dan. Personal interview. 05 Nov. 2008

David. Personal interview. 09 Feb. 2009

Jack. Personal interview. 19 Jan. 2009

Jake. Personal interview. 27 Sept. 2009

James. Personal interview. 20 Oct. 2008

Jasmine. Personal interview. 01 Nov. 2008

John. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008

Kate. Personal interview. 31 Oct. 2008

Katya. Personal interview. 26 Dec. 2008

Larry. Personal interview. 12 Oct. 2008

Megan. Personal interview. 28 Mar. 2009

Michael. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008

Ray. Personal interview. .06 Oct. 2008

Roberto.Personal interview. 13 Oct. 2008

Russ. Personal interview. 16 Jul. 2008

Steven. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2008

Zoe. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2008

Letters

Anonymous. Letter sent to Claire

Ronin Holmes. Personal Letter. Feb. 2009

James Rowland. Personal Letter. Jun. 2009

Kenneth Brydon. Personal Letter. Feb. 2009

Michael Willis. Personal Letter. Feb. 2009

RF Gilliam. Personal Letter. Feb. 2009